

MODERN MANUSCRIPTS

Kenneth W. Duckett, *Modern Manuscripts: a Practical Manual for their Management, Care and Use*. American Association for State and Local History, 1975. xvi+375pp. \$US16 to non-members. ISBN 0-910050-16-3

Reviewed by Peter Biskup

Of the few existing general introductions to the work of manuscript librarian, none is entirely satisfactory. Lucille Kane's little booklet, *A Guide to the Care and Administration of Manuscripts*, a best seller in its time, is fifteen years old; R. B. Bordin's and R. M. Warner's more ambitious *The Modern Manuscript Library*, published in 1966, is too uneven to pass the test of comprehensiveness and is, in any case, also beginning to show signs of old age, while Theodore Schellenberg's *Management of Archives* (1965) suffers from a certain overemphasis on theory and a somewhat forced attempt to equate archival management with manuscript librarianship. It was therefore with some interest that I picked up this new book by Kenneth W. Duckett, Curator of Manuscripts at the Southern Illinois University, long-time secretary of the Manuscript Society and an author with a monograph¹ and several articles to his credit. I read the book in one sitting: it is well written, contains just about the right mixture of the theoretical and the practical, and although it claims to be 'directed towards the novice curator of manuscripts', it is without doubt the most comprehensive treatment of the subject in the English language.

The work has nine chapters, each with a brief but useful list of selected readings, a number of appendices, an eight-page glossary of selected terms, twenty-five pages of bibliographic footnotes and an excellent bibliography of some 450 items. Chapter one is largely a historical survey of manuscript collecting in the United States and is therefore of little interest to Australian readers. Chapter two, entitled 'Administration' has some stimulating observations on the role of subject specialists, the criteria to be used in the selection of personnel, and on the employment of 'volunteers', but is on the whole pedestrian and uninspiring—reflecting, no doubt, a 'singular lack of interest in or understanding of management techniques' on the part of the manuscript curators. Chapter three on the mechanics and ethics of acquisitions is very good indeed. We are treated to a discussion of the difficulties connected with faculty collecting, and are given an exposé of the various kinds of collecting: 'prestige' collecting and the related 'big name syndrome', the past emphasis on collecting the records of the 'victors' rather than those of the 'victims' of history, and the changing fads in collecting responsible for the growth of a number of 'instant' research centres. We are reminded of the array of ethical problems arising out of the donor-dealer-curator relationship, including the possibility of a conflict of interest on the part of the surprisingly large number of curators who are collectors as well. There is also a discussion of the relatively modern concept of a 'collecting field' and of the possibilities of rationalization of acquisitions.

The next two chapters, entitled 'Physical Care and Conservation' and

'Bibliographical Control', are competent summaries of existing literature, although in the latter some passages, for instance those concerning the usefulness of authority files or the Library of Congress list of subject headings, tend to drag a bit. Chapter six on information retrieval is an excellent non-technical overview of the problems and prospects connected with, and arising from, the use of computer and micro-forms, the two devices offering greatest promise in automating information retrieval systems in manuscript libraries. The author looks realistically at some of the past failures such as the SPINDEX project and takes a mid-way line when looking into the future:

The promise is real, the equipment and the know-how exist; but at the outset, it should be understood that any information systems involving the computer and, to a lesser extent, microforms, will be economically feasible for only a few manuscript programs.

Chapter seven, on non-manuscript materials, offers traditional wisdom on the storage and bibliographic control of printed materials (such as ephemera, scrapbooks, clippings and broadsides), films, photographs and sound recordings, discusses the factors to be considered when embarking on an oral history programme, while the curator who acquires machine-readable records is strongly advised to secure also the external and internal documentation without which the records themselves are likely to be of little use to the researcher. Chapter eight, entitled 'Use of Collection' is equally rewarding. It discusses the need for policy statements defining access to the collection, examines the areas where the curator may run afoul of the law (copyright, libel and slander), and looks at the implications of the Loewenheim episode and the Bognor Regis case which have nullified to some extent the general disclaimer of liability for information supplied hitherto widely used by archivists and manuscript librarians. No fewer than eleven pages are devoted to problems of security—not really surprising when one considers that one enterprising thief, George Matz, had managed over the years to acquire research material worth over half a million dollars in 1964, by posing as a professor under various aliases, and 'it was said that his overbearing and bullying manner intimidated repository staff'.

The final chapter, entitled 'Public Service', offers nothing startling, dealing as it does with the arrangement of exhibits, the role of microfilm as a medium for making manuscript sources available outside the repository, the publication of finding aids, the activities of Friends' organizations, and so on. The appendices include specifications and drawings for cartons and flat storage manuscript boxes, a perpetual calendar, and a guide to associations and their publications, suppliers of equipment and purveyors of services of interest to the manuscript curator.

Two criticisms can be levelled against the work, one trifling, the other more serious. The former concerns the U.S. bias of the book which, naturally, diminishes its usefulness for Australian readers, though one should hasten to add that it is far more universal than the average text of U.S. origin. The latter centres around the considerable unevenness of the book, due partly to the author's intentional stress on certain aspects of manuscript librarianship at the expense of others ('because I felt that they have not been sufficiently covered in the

literature'), and partly because of the way the book had come into this world. The author, having been 'commissioned' by the American Association for State and Local History to write the book, had been assisted by an editorial advisory committee composed of the doyens of the profession, and had also to contend with the advice of about three-dozen manuscript curators. 'Authorship by committee' does not guarantee quality, and from the Preface one gets the impression that, left alone, the author may have produced a somewhat different kind of work. Whatever the case, we should thank Mr Duckett for giving us a lively book on a topic which is not inherently exciting. I shall certainly use it with my students at the Canberra College of Advanced Education, and I doubt if there is an archivist or manuscript librarian in Australia who could not benefit by reading it.

REFERENCE

1. *Frontiersman of Fortune: Moses M. Strong of Mineral Point*, State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1955.

DOCUMENTS ON AUSTRALIAN FOREIGN POLICY 1937-38

R. G. Neale, ed., *Documents on Australian Foreign Policy 1937-49*. Volume I, 1937-38. Department of Foreign Affairs, Canberra, 1975. xlvii + 616pp. \$12.00. ISBN 0-642-00994-5

Reviewed by Robert Manne

At first it must be said that the editor of this first volume of *Documents on Australian Foreign Policy 1937-49*, Professor R. G. Neale, and his assistants, P. G. Edwards and H. Kenway, deserve hearty congratulations. Modelled, appropriately enough, on the mother series *Documents on British Foreign Policy*, this volume is edited not only with great scholarly precision but even more than that with a kind of infectious ebullience. Appendices giving a brief history of the development of the External Affairs Department and biographical notes on all the protagonists of these years ('BALL W. MacMahon, Australian diplomat and academic', 'MUSSOLINI Benito, Italian politician', etc.) are welcome improvements on the practices of the British editors. Sometimes the precision and enthusiasm become a little comic. The scholarly apparatus frequently seems to flatter these often empty or fatuous documents, like a gilt frame for a Bondi postcard. And I wonder if we really need to know that there was a two-hour time difference between Canberra and Wellington in the summer of 1937, or that N.Z. is an abbreviation for New Zealand, or for that matter that HITLER Adolf was 'a German politician' who 'committed suicide 30 April 1945'? Yet if these be editorial vices they are vices through excess of virtue.

The editors have been forced to go farther afield in search of their sources than did their British counterparts. Documents from the Prime Minister's Department and from Defence and Trade are, necessarily, used in addition to the records of the miniscule External Affairs Department of 1937-38. The Australian editors' policy would have

allowed the use of material from Cabinet discussions of foreign policy. But apparently little useful material of this kind turned up. (The British editors have always declined to include material on inner Cabinet discussions and disagreements on foreign policy.) The reader of this volume will find little information concerning the role of the individual politicians inside Australia in the making of foreign policy in these years. Only the all too few despatches of the British High Commissioner in Canberra shed light on the *politics* of foreign policy in Australia. These are so interesting that one wonders why so few of his comments on the local political scene are printed here.

Ex-Prime Minister Whitlam in his foreword to this volume justifies its publication thus: 'Citizens in a democracy have a right to know, not only the foreign policy of their country, but how that policy was formulated.' In fact few citizens will read—or even peruse—this volume ('Pass the Documents, dear?'). This is so obviously and necessarily a volume for libraries and scholars. Yet might one suggest at the conclusion of the series the printing of one shorter, select volume of documents for the whole period, 1937-49? By this means some Australian citizens might choose to exercise their right to know about their country's record in recent international history.

II

This volume throws the reader directly into the central period of the British appeasement of Germany, 1937-38. Rather than a policy of disengagement from Europe, appeasement in fact represented the attempt after 1937 of the new and vigorous Prime Minister, Neville Chamberlain, to end the hopeless drift that he believed to have been the foreign policy of Baldwin and to deepen British involvement in the affairs of Central Europe. German strength had increased British sympathies for German grievances. (Rather like the diplomatic weakening of Israel has increased the sympathy of the West for the Palestinian refugees.) The aim of appeasement was the prompt satisfaction of real and imagined German demands *before* they became threatening to peace. As these German demands were, however, aimed against her neighbours in Central Europe, British magnanimity was generally at the expense of other nations. To hide this fact the British were forced to pretend that small nations, like the Czechs, rather than the Germans, were endangering peace. Morally speaking the period 1937-38 is one of peculiar unpleasantness. Capitulation to violence parading as self-righteousness always gives off a vile stench.

The Australian Government, like all the Dominions' Governments, was a devout supporter of British appeasement efforts. They had of course very real reason to support it: any British involvement in European war rendered even more unlikely the capacity of Britain to defend Australia against Japan. The deepest meaning of Australian policy in these years was put with admirable (and unusual) clarity by a young External Affairs officer in 1938, J. D. Hood. 'British policy . . . has now to take into account the views of the Dominions, which are quite ready to accept the fact of German domination . . . east of the Rhine' (p. 532). In line with this policy, in late September 1938, with Europe on the brink of war, the British were warned with some

gravity that the Dominions would only support a war with greatest reluctance (p. 467) while after the crisis had passed the Australian Prime Minister, Joe Lyons, telegraphed to Chamberlain: 'Colleagues and I desire to express our warmest congratulations at the outcome of the negotiations at Munich' (p. 476).

Yet despite a kind of surface rationality to Australia's support for the British policy of appeasement it must also be stressed that leading Australian conservatives like Menzies, Casey and Page displayed in their attitude towards Central Europe in these years an unenviable combination of narrowness, moral callousness and stupidity.

There were many very silly British visitors to Germany in the late 1930s but perhaps none so silly as R. G. Menzies. Visiting Berlin in 1938 he reported the following findings. Chamberlain and Halifax were highly respected in German Government circles; Germany had no desire to absorb the Sudeten Germans into the Reich; the Germans were 'enormously impressed' by British rearmament and were, paradoxically enough, pleased about the strength of the Anglo-French entente, which they thought would prevent the French from doing 'silly things'. His chief conclusion was that without 'a firm hand at Prague' the Czechoslovak President, Benes, 'will continue to bluff at the expense of much more important nations including our own' (p. 400-1).

And there were perhaps few British politicians who could equal the narrowness of the Country Party leader, Sir Earle Page, who argued the case for appeasement in order to revive Australia's agricultural sales to Germany. 'Germany had formerly', he argued in May 1938, 'been one of Australia's most important markets for her wool and other raw materials . . . What Australia desired . . . was a politically satisfied Germany . . . Would the German Government be satisfied if they got the Sudeten Germans, and if they would be satisfied, would it not be wise to give the Sudeten Germans to them?' (p. 361-2). Rarely has the silo vision of international affairs been stated with more crudity.

The Australian Government believed the Czechoslovak Government had a moral obligation to give up its territory, sovereignty and security in the larger interests of peace. However this largesse at the expense of others was in no way allowed to call into question Australia's rights to its security. During these years any suggestion that New Guinea be returned to Germany was met with an immediate and unbending negative (which was of course a most sensible policy). The costs of appeasement were definitely for them and not for us.

Similarly and more importantly during 1937 and 1938 the Australian Government showed no sign of being willing to appease Japan, to Australia's cost. After having permitted a Japanese concern to prepare to mine and export iron ore from Yampi Sound the Government swiftly reversed policy and with commendable toughness informed the Japanese Government that their rights to mine the iron had been revoked. The story the Australian Government told the Japanese was that a recent geological survey had shown a far more meagre reserve of iron ore than had been previously believed. This was at best a half truth. The genuine reason for preventing Japanese

activities was expressed by the Australian Trade Commissioner in Japan. 'It is a considered opinion that the fulfillment of the Brassert-Japan Mining Agreement could have the practical effect of affording a foothold to Japan upon Australian territory for a very long time and the position is so exceedingly serious as to justify the compulsory cancellation of the Brassert Scheme by any means whatsoever' (p. 235).

The Australian tough-line here came after the major Japanese invasion of China and at the time when Japanese aggression had embarrassingly exposed the almost total incapacity of the British to defend any of its interests in the Far East. The British had, accordingly, no alternative but supine tolerance of Japanese and were considerably upset by the insensitivity of the Australians, who in this case were certainly not aiding the pretension of British power in the Far East. The British Ambassador to Tokyo while seeing Australian intransigence as 'inevitable' nevertheless wanly expressed his regret at the increased difficulties Australia was creating for Britain in its efforts to hold onto its position in China (p. 381).

III

In fact the hard truth about the Australian position in the world in 1937-38 was that Australia was almost entirely undefended. The constant refrain one hears intoned throughout this volume, that Australia rests secure protected by the mighty British navy, has an altogether hollow ring. It is quite clear that the very men who adopt the rhetoric of Australian security are more than half conscious that it is a myth. Balanced beside the rhetoric of confidence in British protection is the nervous and realistic question the Australian Government in these years feel forced to address time and again to the British Chiefs of Staff: namely, what guarantee have the Australians that a British fleet will be despatched to the Far East in the case of a war there if the British navy is contending in her home waters with Germany?

At heart it was an unanswerable question, but as it was also the only question genuinely worth the asking it was asked, and answered, often. The resultant exchanges produce at once the most deeply comic and deeply disturbing documents of the entire volume. What becomes clear is that a strange game of double bluff is being played. The Australian Ministers, forced both by public opinion and by a deep-seated awareness of Australia's isolation, do ask the crucial questions. Yet they do not appear to want true, rigorous answers. If they had pushed hard enough perhaps they might have received the answer they most feared: that Australia had no guarantee of British protection. This would, of course, have been an altogether dismaying answer. Instead they probed gently, tactfully, coaxing the British to provide them with comforting verbal guarantees, expressing satisfaction with the patently empty and deceptive answers they received. A passage from one of the discussions at the Imperial Conference of 1937 provides superb evidence for this point. It is worth quoting in detail.

Sir Archdale Parkhill (Australian Minister for Defence) said that his reason for pressing the Chiefs of Staff on this point was that the section of opinion in Australia which advocated the concentration of defence

expenditure on the Army and Air Force instead of on the Navy explored two main arguments: The first was that the British fleet would not be sent to the Far East at all; and the second: that even if it went to Singapore it would not be strong enough to resist capture before its arrival. The first argument had been disposed of by the Chiefs of Staff Appreciation, but an assurance was required that the second argument was also groundless.

To this he received the following assurance from the British Chief of Naval Staff, Lord Chatfield:

Singapore could be regarded as a first-class insurance for the security of Australia. If, however, he were asked whether Singapore was 100 per cent secure or only 99.1 per cent it would be impossible to give a categorical answer.

Yet Sir Archdale felt impelled to push further, for he 'enquired whether the fortress could be regarded as 75 per cent secure,' to which he received the following reply from the Chief of the Imperial General Staff, Sir Cyril Deverell:

As all our plans were based upon the fortress holding out . . . it would therefore be reasonable to assume a much higher percentage of security.

(I must admit I find this one of the most hilarious *non sequiturs* I have ever encountered.) Sir Archdale however, 'expressed himself as satisfied with the assurance given' (p. 169).

There was however another reason the Australians did not push their questioning too hard. This was because of their outright refusal to outlay money necessary to build their own capital ships for the Far East, a request which was frequently made by the British navy during 1937-38 and as frequently turned down by the Australians.

In short this meticulously prepared, beautifully printed volume of documents makes rather depressing reading. Parsimoniousness, self deception, pompous provincialism, moral callousness and narrowness of vision were the qualities that dominated the conduct of Australian foreign policy in 1937 and 1938. There may be many who would argue that this is not a tradition from which we have yet emerged.

BIOGRAPHICAL REGISTER: FEDERAL PARLIAMENT

Joan Rydon, *A Biographical Register of the Commonwealth Parliament 1901-1972*. Australian National University Press, Canberra, 1975. xvii + 229pp. \$7.95. ISBN 0-7081-0644-7

Reviewed by John Poynter

This is the fifth in the series *Australian Parliaments: Biographical Notes*, which began as long ago as 1959 with A. W. Martin and P. Wardle, *Members of the Legislative Assembly in N.S.W. 1856-1901*. G. C. Bolton and Ann Mozley, *The Western Australian Legislature 1870-1930* appeared in 1961; there was then an interval of eleven years before the publication in 1972 of both D. B. Waterson, *A Biographical Register of the Queensland Parliament 1860-1929*, and Kathleen Thomson and Geoffrey Serle, *A Biographical Register of the Victorian Legislature 1851-1900*. The new volume includes all members of the Commonwealth Parliament from its inception until 1972, a

date which incidentally truncates the parliamentary biographies of Mr Whitlam's ministers and saved the editor the task of tracing their complex fortunes.

This *Register* maintains the virtues of its predecessors in the series, and is especially useful in bringing together so many national figures of the twentieth century. (The earlier volumes on New South Wales and Victoria stopped at the end of the nineteenth century, and we have nothing at all for South Australia or Tasmania.) Anyone who has worked in twentieth-century Australian history knows too well the paucity of basic works of reference from which to identify minor figures or check a fact in a major career. In due and stately course the *Australian Dictionary of Biography* will progress to 1940. Here, in much more skeletal form, is a work of reference which should not stray far from the desks of those working with or on the records of recent Australia.

The format, with about four entries to each broad page of offset-reproduced typescript, paper-bound, is adequate if scarcely luxurious. Each entry includes, in sharply abbreviated form, basic biographical information, notes on any extra-parliamentary career, and the formal record of parliamentary activities. By chance a sample entry from M. Stenton, *Who's Who of British Members of Parliament* vol. I, reached me on the same day; it is less laconic, much more expensive, and is firmly based on successive volumes of Dod's *Parliamentary Companion*. No such convenient source existed for Professor Rydon and her assistants, and the labour involved in such a project in Australia is prodigious. Inevitably there are slips or misprints: recent events have perhaps made it easier to tell one Fraser from another, and random browsing finds Sir Joseph Cook Prime Minister in 1917 (and not earlier), Forrest Premier of Western Australia while no longer a member of its parliament, 'Cheekheaton' for 'Cleckheaton' in Mr Peter Howson's business career, and a blank where Mr Gordon Bryant's mother ought to be. The progressively corrected copy of the *Dictionary of National Biography* in the Institute of Historical Research in London is evidence that works of reference should be printed with margins wide enough for corrigenda.

Browsing also invites broader speculation. Here they all are, our federal representatives, from Abbott to Zeal. Lawyers, graziers, union organizers—all manner of men except the aristocratic hereditary oligarchs of Stenton's volume. The editor promises separate publication of an analysis of much of this material, and generously invites others to join her. Where is the Australian Namier, to ask who goes to Canberra, and why? At least he or she will now have a check-list with which to begin his or her labours.